

BLIND GUY FAWKES

From

All the Year Round, November 25, 1876

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AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

attained, short as it may be considered by some, was truly marvellous."

And yet, great as were the trials undergone by all, the real work of discovery was done by the sledgers, as has nearly always been the case since the time of Parry. And it is surprising how small an amount of human life has been lost in these excursions. Captain Sherard Osborn, a good authority on all these matters, said about eight years ago, "During thirty-six years of glorious enterprise, England has never lost a sledge-party, out of about a hundred that have tailed within the Arctic Circle."

BLIND GUY FAWKES.

POOR GUY! He is burning as he has burnt any time since that fifth of November on which he attempted to "blow Scotchmen back to Scotland." He is blazing in the midst of tar-barrels and brushwood. The great bonfire pouring out masses of flame and sparks—careful officer of the Fire Brigade keeping watch meanwhile—lights up an odd scene.

We are in a great square on a November night, dim walls enclosing it. Rockets are shooting far into the wintry sky, Roman candles are jetting out stars of many-coloured flame. Catherine-wheels whizz round on tree trunks; squibs are spouting out their short but sparkling life; crackers banging and barking on the ground, noisy, demonstrative, and soon extinct, like fussy politicians; and, besides all these, there is plenty of high pyrotechnic art from Mr. Brook's famous laboratory—set-pieces, Chinese trees, fiery fountains, and the like. Plenty of noise, plenty of fire, and plenty of light. Round the bonfire dance merry figures—rushing hurriedly now and then to the window whence fireworks are liberally dealt out—exulting in the noise, the crackle, the fun generally; glorying in Guy Fawkes and his sublime cremation. They are "knowing," these shadowy forms of boys and half-grown men. They keep the fire at a respectful distance, save when one, bolder than the rest, gives a tar-barrel a kick to bring out the sparks in golden showers. They never light their fireworks at the wrong end, as has happened to philosophers before now, but manage them deftly and skilfully. They are enjoying themselves immensely; and, as the last glorious wheel dies out, the last cracker and

the last maroon explode, they open their throats with a hearty cheer—a three times three—in honour of, it may be supposed, the Protestant succession. They have thoroughly enjoyed the festival of St. Guy; and, when the embers of the fire sink low, go indoors to bed, satisfied, but not satiated, with the fun of the evening.

The odd part of this fête is that the celebrants are blind—many of them wholly unconscious of the light of day, people to whom life is one long Arctic night, unilluminated by lamp of heavenly or earthly make. There are others who, although their blindness is unhappily complete enough to prevent them from distinguishing surrounding objects, are yet dimly conscious of sunrise and sunset. The latter enjoy the fireworks keenly, perhaps more keenly than those who see perfectly; but it is difficult to understand the fun of fireworks to the utterly blind. That they produce no effect on some people, is proved by the demeanour of the industrious man, who has retreated out of the noise and bustle into a quiet corner in the dark, and is working away at basket-making as if his life depended upon getting that pretty basket, with the white and red stripes, done this very night. The glare of the bonfire, when the flames shoot up on this side, just reveals the pattern of the work on which he is busied; but he is otherwise so completely in the dark, that ordinary people can barely make out his figure in the corner. He is absorbed in his task. Great wheels spin round unheeded by the basket-maker; maroons thunder out their warning in vain. On perpetually move his busy fingers among the osier-meshes, woven with strips red or white, selected with unerring accuracy by this one solitary man who cares not for Guy Fawkes or his fête. Alas, poor fellow! He cannot "remember the Fifth of November," for he never heard of that or anything else. He is not only blind, but absolutely stone deaf; yet is he a capital basket-maker; and an honest and good-humoured fellow, if you only know how to talk to him by taking one of his hands, and touching it rapidly in various parts, as Miss Quarman is now doing. He is not absolutely dumb, but articulates a few words—a very limited vocabulary—and then goes back to work with a will, ignoring the high jinks going on around him utterly and completely. But the boys who are only blind are as "jolly" as those proverbial youths whose birth or occupation is associ-

ated with "sand." Miss Quarman and Mr. Sander have as much as they can do to distribute Roman candles, squibs, and crackers to the numerous applicants, who appear singularly well acquainted with the properties of various kinds of fireworks. It is difficult to realise that these boys are blind. When hurrying towards the window they never miss it, and, what is stranger still, never blunder over one another; and they have the keenest appreciation of the difference between a squib and a cracker. The Roman candle and the Jack-in-the-box are the prime favourites, next comes the cracker, and lastly squibs and golden rain. The triumphs of pyrotechny—set-pieces, wheels, and coloured rockets—are comparatively unheeded, a single maroon being worth a boxful of them.

The boys—and, in a quiet way, the girls—at the institution in the Avenue-road, under the care of the London Society for Teaching the Blind to Read, have had a glorious holiday on this Fifth of November. There has been much fun over the dressing of the guy, and carrying him round. It was curious to see those little ones, who had not assisted in the "make-up," approach, one by one, to "look at," as they call it—in ordinary literal English to "feel"—the guy. These young blind folk, when they touch anything, always "look at" it, and, if they have met and touched persons, say, "I saw him to-day," in the most offhand and matter-of-course way. On the subject of blindness they are extraordinarily sensitive, and express their dislike to any questioning concerning their infirmity. Blind is, in fact, among the blind, an expression of contempt. As a rule they find their way about with remarkable skill; but should some poor awkward fellow blunder by accident over a chair or up against one of his schoolfellows, the reproof generally takes this form: "You must be blind." Perhaps the strangest and most interesting time to see any institution for the blind is at dusk. While others are blundering and floundering about, the blind people move hither and thither noiselessly and accurately. An odd effect is felt on entering the printing-office of the school in the Avenue-road, late on a winter afternoon. The house is dark, the passage is dark, the office is darker still, but there are the printers, setting up type and pulling proofs with all possible celerity and exactitude. The master

printer courteously proposes to light a candle for the sake of visitors, who perhaps "cannot see very well." It is unnecessary to explain that the production of books for the blind is quite another affair from that of ordinary printer's work. No ink is necessary, but the paper must be forced up into relief, that the pupils may feel out their letters easily; and the consequence ensues that literature for the blind is bulky. An immense deal of printing is accomplished at the office in the Avenue-road, for the London Society for Teaching the Blind to Read do not confine themselves to printing the books for use in the school, but supply each pupil on leaving with a little library of his own, and vote gifts of books to other institutions. Mr. Lucas's stenographic system—a kind of embossed shorthand—is that followed by Mr. Shaw in the gloomy printing-office just described; and there is, moreover, a great quantity of music-printing done.

This is as it should be, and perhaps it would be well—when there is leisure—to give the printing of embossed books a more liberal margin. At present there is a superabundance of tracts, and only one history—that of England, of course. Possibly the blind are, by their peculiar infirmity, more qualified than ordinary persons to appreciate the value of a perpetual study of divinity; but whether this be so or not, they have but little opportunity for studying anything else. To a certain extent this defect in the blind library is compensated by the efforts of a number of benevolent ladies, who gratify the pupils by reading to them selections from the works of popular essayists and novelists; but it seems a pity that such works as Macaulay's Essays should not be embossed, rather than multitudinous but feeble tracts. If they were, it would be possible to understand the exultation of a pupil who declares that the one great advantage that blind people have over others is, that they can read comfortably in bed. "You," says a studious damsel, "are uncomfortable when you read in bed—you know you are. You are obliged to hold the book up till you are tired, and then have to twist yourself about to get the light, and catch cold in your shoulders. If it is night-time you must be very naughty to light a candle, which is sure to gutter down and set the house on fire. Now when I take a book to bed, I bury myself under the clothes,

book and all, and read away as fast—as fast—till I go fast asleep.”

It is not, however, sufficient that blind children should be taught to read; they must be taught to write—not quite so easy an operation. The last new plan is the system of M. Braille—admirably logical and ingenious—and adapted for intercommunication between the blind; no unimportant matter when it is considered that the assistant-master at Avenue-road is a blind man and former pupil. On the Braille system the writer is provided with a small frame, in which a piece of paper is held down by a brass band, perforated with oblong openings, at regular distances. Each one of these openings will hold one letter; and all the letters and contractions used are produced by modifying the position of six dots, like the six on a domino, only embossed instead of being sunken and blackened. The pen is an instrument like an awl; and the writer, beginning on the right of the paper instead of the left—for it must be turned over to be read—prods away at rare pace. When the paper is covered with writing, it is removed from the frame, turned over, and can be read with great facility. One great advantage of this method is that there is no manual dexterity required to form a dot—the exercise being purely, simply of the memory itself. The last new ciphering-slate is also peculiar in arrangement. It is a zinc plate—square—with twelve octagonal perforations in each direction, a species of multiplication table in itself. To set up the sums as the teacher reads them aloud, the pupil is provided with almost a fount of type, fitting accurately into the octagonal spaces just spoken of. The type are furnished either with two dots on one of the octagon faces, or with a diagonal line from left to right, or a perpendicular line.

Now, the type with the two little dots can be made to signify the numerals from one to eight, by simple variations of position. If the two dots appear on the first side of the octagonal receptacle to the left, the figure one is indicated; if, on the other hand, they appear at the base of the octagon, they signify eight. The diagonal line signifies nine; and the vertical one, a cipher—and there are the Arabic numerals complete. At their arithmetical work blind children are like other children—some fairly intelligent; others, intensely stupid. In one branch, however—to wit, mental arithmetic—the blind are very strong; and it

seems almost a pity that this very useful study should not be pushed on, even to the sacrifice of arithmetic in its ordinary form. It would seem as if blind boys ought all to be “calculating” boys. By the sense of touch they can acquire a perfect idea of numbers; and there seems no reason why they should not advance to the higher calculations by purely mental processes without going through the tedium of setting up sums. That this is no random theory of the writer, is proved by the acute perception by blind people of the divisions of time and tone. They play admirably on the pianoforte and on the organ, and, in fact, look to music as their most ready means of gaining a livelihood—not altogether as performers, but as pianoforte tuners. Messrs. Hopkinson & Co. have the merit of being the first pianoforte-makers in London who undertook to train the blind as tuners. Their first attempts in this direction have been largely followed, and the institution is prepared to supply perfectly competent tuners to any families requiring their services. The present foreman of the tuners to Messrs. Hopkinson was once a pupil at the school, and was thence apprenticed to his present employers, under whom he has risen to the head of his branch of the trade.

Some odd stories are told of the basket-makers, who evince a marked preference for very sharp knives, to trim and split their osiers withal, and have a marked objection to be stared at by Philistines—that is, people who can see. At one time they were greatly annoyed, as they were in the act of soaking their osier-twigs in a tank, specially provided for that purpose, to find that there was a stranger among them, an enterprising loafer, who had climbed over the tall fence in order to have a close view. He repented of his audacity, for the blind youths pounced upon him, and ducked him in the tank till he was half-drowned. Many more curious tales are told of the blind, one of which they refuse to believe themselves—viz., the story of the girl whose fingers, having been so hardened by manual labour that she could not learn to write on the Lucasian system, learnt to read with her lips. Others they assert to be absolutely correct and trustworthy, especially a wonderful instance of sagacity in a fellow-pupil who, since she left the school—having mastered every accomplishment taught there—has married a blind husband, is an excellent housekeeper,

cooks her husband's dinner, makes and actually "cuts out," and fits her children's clothes, washes, starches, and irons her husband's shirts, and plays the piano like an angel. I am a person of facile faith, hating the trouble of doubting things, and therefore believe implicitly in the existence of this accomplished lady; but I feel obliged to mention, after the excellent example set by Herodotus, and followed by Sir John Maundevile, "Verilie I have not seen hir."

A BAD BARGAIN.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

It was a pity Hannah Maria could not have been got off sooner, for some good material was spoiled by the delay. Her temper suffered; her housewifely talents were turned into the empty channel of fancy-work; her father and mother became cross and crusty; and a comfortable, well-ordered house was utterly spoiled for the bachelor friends of the family. These unfortunates found themselves at once doomed to devotion to Hannah Maria. She expected it, her parents demanded it, and there was no safety but in flight. Yet Mr. and Mrs. Holder were pleasant, genial people under ordinary circumstances, but it was trying to have Hannah Maria so long on hand. Two younger daughters of the house had passed easily and naturally to the matrimonial estate, and another sprightly young thing was coming up smilingly to the front. But still Hannah Maria held on; not willingly, perhaps, if a furrowed brow and drawn lips might be accepted as indications of the state of her feelings. And yet she was well-looking, her figure fine, her complexion fair; and she boasted a quantity of auburn tresses, which had stood to her nobly during the advancing years of her spinsterhood. But, somehow, Hannah Maria didn't "take." Perhaps it was her name which was against her; but more probably it was her temper. Here, I lament to say, a flavour of acidity was discernible, which was apt to lead to effervescence on the slightest provocation. She always said that her nervous system was too highly strung to bear collision with another. It was a nice way of putting it, and of accounting for the various unpleasant shocks, which her excitable and irascible moods occasioned to others.

Her abode was a sylvan retreat, near a cathedral town. Her parents were

tolerably wealthy, and gave her a good allowance for her dress, which she expended shrewdly, with a far-seeing eye as to change and effect.

I, Richard Rewitt, a third cousin thrice removed, lived near, and might have seen a good deal of her; but a little went a long way, and I was content with the acceptance of an occasional invitation to dinner, and an escape from any more serious entanglement than a game at whist, the fair Hannah Maria being rigidly allotted to me as a partner, and her father and mother playing Darby and Joan for our benefit on opposite chairs.

A crisis, however, was approaching. Another birthday of the hopeless eldest's drew on. Her family grew desperate. Could nothing be done? Perhaps she had not been brought properly forward; some more effective scene of action must be tried; and, in a panic, they rushed at private theatricals. Hannah Maria was to be a Sultana, her braided locks decked with pearls and tinsel, a rose tint added to her faded cheeks, her eyebrows pencilled, and the orbs beneath made almond-shaped by a judicious elongation of the shadows.

A suite of weak young men were entrapped into the business, and I hope no one will take offence at the prefixed adjective when I admit that I made one among the number. Her sister Jessie was really a pretty little girl, and two cousins of the ladies, very lively in their manners if plain in their persons, were also enlisted amongst the actors, so that possibly there is some excuse for our imbecility.

It was at first an accepted programme in our ranks, that all would steer clear of Hannah Maria. But as we were four hapless gentlemen, with only three available ladies to divide amongst us, this plan was rather a perplexing one on the face of it. It followed, as a matter of necessity, that the lot of evil fell to the youngest and greenest of our party. Johnny Bowles was an obliging, unoffending young fellow, and he yielded with so good a grace that I felt my sympathies quite touched in his behalf, and I went to work with a will to coach him up in his part. He was to be Selim to Hannah's Zuleika, and we managed that his services should be accepted by the lady on the representation that his histrionic talents were of a superior order, and that the Irvings and Barry Sullivans, the Rossis and Salvinis

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